

# Archbishop of Canterbury's comments provoke response from British government

by [Martin Revis](#)

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London, June 10 (ENInews) -- In a strongly-worded opinion piece in the June 9 issue of The New Statesman, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, took a stand against recent economic, criminal justice, and healthcare reforms proposed by British Prime Minister David Cameron.

Williams, launching his broadside as guest editor of the weekly journal, said Britain's coalition government is forcing through "radical policies for which no one voted." He questioned whether democratic legitimacy existed for flagship policies on welfare, health and education, which he said were causing "anxiety and anger." He also dismissed Cameron's "Big Society" initiative for the voluntary sector to play a greater role in providing services as "painfully stale" and condemned what he described as punitive action against alleged abuses of the benefit system.

Cameron rejected Williams' criticisms, which have divided opinion among many Christians. In response to the Archbishop's comments, Cameron told reporters in Belfast before addressing the Northern Ireland Assembly that he profoundly disagreed with many of Williams' views, particularly on debt, welfare and education. He could see nothing "good or moral" in passing national debts to the next generation, trapping people on welfare or in poorly performing schools.

Pensions Minister Duncan Smith, whose welfare reform proposals seek to offer incentives to work rather than live on benefits, said the government had inherited a system that leaves people abandoned in a record number of jobless households and damages those it seeks to save.

Two Anglican bishops, Christopher Hill and Tim Stevens, have come out in support of Williams, but Giles Fraser, Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, asked whether the Archbishop had the right to question the democratic legitimacy of the coalition while accepting the way church appointments were made. Some MPs have used Williams' comments to argue that unelected bishops should not be appointed to the House of Lords, and removed when reform of the upper chamber was finally complete.